

ONCE UPON A TIME

in Bristol, Indiana, U.S.A.

Elkhart County, Washington Township

(circa 1910-1920)

*by -
The Rev. Bruce Mosier*

By the Rev. Bruce Mosier

To my good friend,
George,

Merry Christmas. '87

F. Moier

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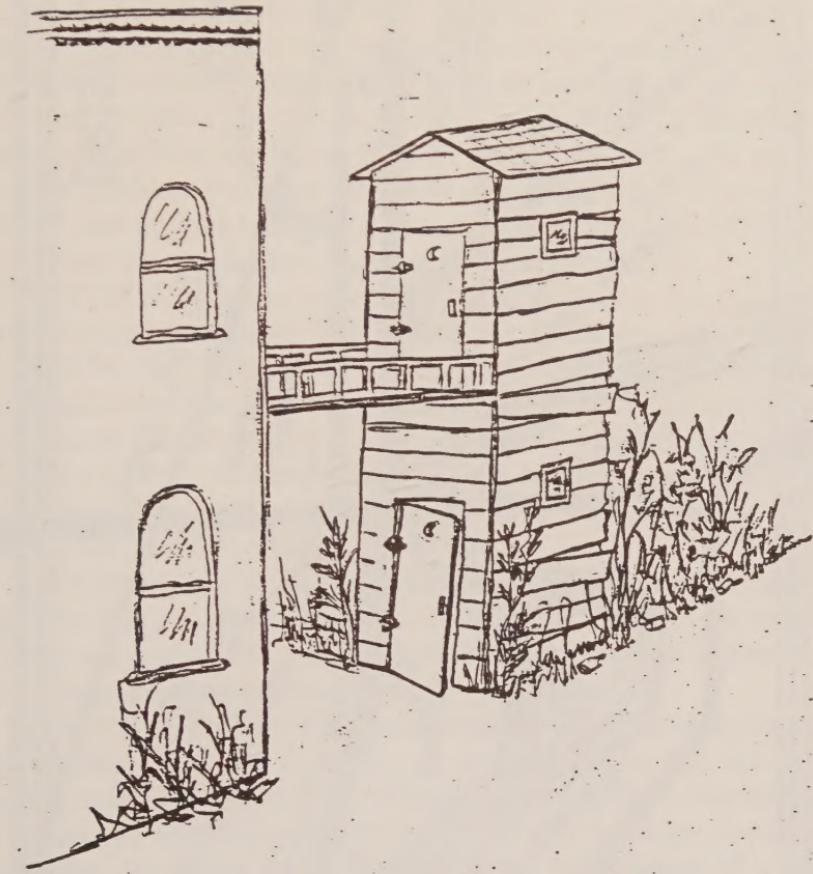
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*For all that is written here
I give thanks to God for
having blessed me with childhood
in a small town —
to my wife, Dorothy, and
our kids, Norma and Max;
our grandchildren who enjoyed my
telling of these tales —
and to my friends
Joseph "Big Joe" Bradford,
who urged me to write;
to Lewis and Elizabeth Fidler,
who were my first real listeners.
With special thanks to
Chris Brown for her art work,
and to Howard C. Menges for the use
of pictures from his collection.
God bless you all.*

(D)

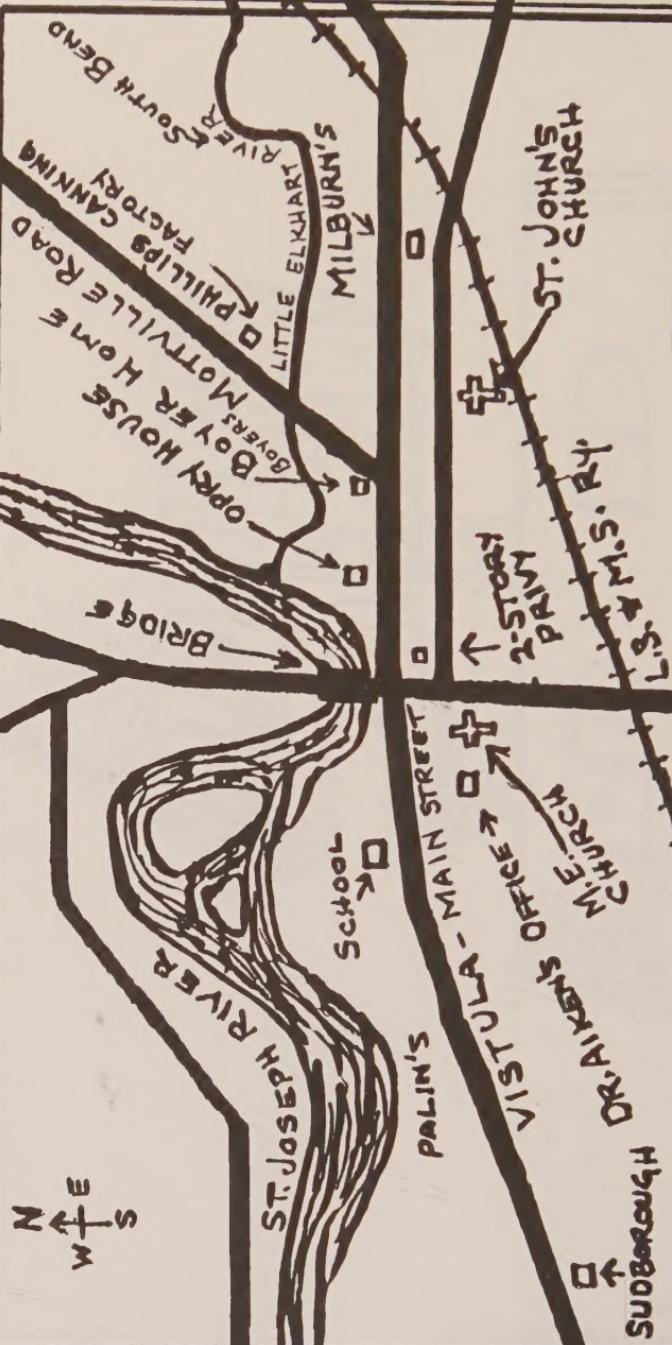
FRONTISpieces . . .



TAKE TIME TO
SMELL THE HOLLYHOCKS

— *Suitable for framing*

BRISTOL



Preface

ALL FAIRY TALES used to begin with "Once Upon a Time." What follows is no fairy tale but it does begin with those words, for it covers a rather brief span of years, say from 1910 to 1921, give or take a few each way. It is a series of bits of reminiscence from those days in my home town of Bristol, Indiana, and some of the most glorious souls that God ever created. It will have to do with some of our actions in a sort of geographical Paradise. Bristol was indeed that for small boys then (and still is, I'm sure.)

BRISTOL was located on the banks of a river by a group of beauty-loving individuals. This stream, the St. Joseph, was known as the "Old St. Joe." There was a tributary creek, the Little Elkhart ... a railroad, the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern, ran on its way from nearby Elkhart to the East ... there were nearby lakes, and the hill-land south of town provided excellent territory for the raising of fruit, the picking of which provided boys and girls with pocket money from Spring to Fall.

OVER AND ABOVE all the natural blessings it had people, God bless 'em, who loved people — they took care of one another, and they certainly took care of their kids. You just can't grow up in any better surroundings than these.

THERE IS LITTLE purpose behind these tales other than the preservation of trivia. I make no attempt to record the really important bits of history of our village and its people ... I do not have the ability nor the inclination to write with any brilliance. I dedicate this writing, whatever it turns out to be, to the memory of a grand boyhood spent with many friends, and to all boys who had the good fortune to grow up in a small town. If it reminds them of their own boyhood days for just a moment perhaps, that will be ample reward indeed. All the characters in this book are "innocent" but on occasion I have changed a name or two in case they think otherwise.

IT IS ALL to remember, to love and perhaps to laugh.

* * *

1

Architecture

ARCHITECTURALLY wise (if there be such a term) Bristol didn't have a great deal to offer. Three spots were really worthy of especial attention. The two most imposing in the eyes of a small boy are still standing, as the pattern for villages was in those days, at opposite ends of Vistula, or Main street. They are good, solid brick buildings — two-story and sitting in rather (in those days, at least) spacious spots.

THE GEORGE MILBURN home, on the east side of town, was one of the great spots in my kid days. There were several members of the family living, and there were numerous relatives, including young people ... there was always a great deal of activity at the Milburn home. My Uncle Earl and Aunt Nellie Merritt and my seven cousins lived just across the street; next to them lived another couple of kids, Estil and Walter Bunker. The Milburn house was the central meeting spot for what we called the East End Tribe. It was a popular spot for the adults of the village, too, and I remember being present at many evening parties. Baby sitters were not in the picture in those days so the families always attended parties ... when the hour grew late the kids were piled on a couple of beds upstairs, covered with certain, respective overcoats — (just to remember which child was which, I guess.) Ah, what a joy just to remember falling asleep to the sound of music and laughter and friendly cheer.

ON THE WEST side of town was the Will Sudborough home, another two-story brick house, with a large-room cupola at the roof center. The atmosphere around here was a little more austere, and always a little mystifying to me. There were a couple of girls in the family, and once, I remember being with my older sister, Marie, on a visit there. During the day they took me up to the cupola room "for the view." They could see "almost to Elkhart," so they said ... to me it looked like a better spot to "spy the Indians a-comin' down by the river."

THE THIRD SPOT claiming attention was the John Boyer home, then standing on the northwest corner of the intersection of Main Street and the Mottville road (now Road 15.) 'Twas quite a

show-place — two-story red brick, with a porch on the two front sides — all trimmed in white it made an impression upon the town visitors. At the rear stood a large barn sheltering a team of fancy horses. Occasionally the team was hitched up to a brightly yellow-trimmed two-seater buggy just to take the family "for a trot" around town. Later this property was purchased by Levi Barnes and became his family home. Additions were made to the barn and the Barnes Lumber and Coal Co. came into being. A great fire (of which I will write later) took the lumber buildings one night, and some years later the home was torn down. The property became the site of a filling station, and still is.

THE REST of the houses in town may not have been started as great creations off the drawing board, but they were good, well-built frame buildings. For the most part they were well kept, neat and nicely painted, situated along the well-shaded streets. They were not only houses — they were homes in the finest sense of the word. Architects do not dream up such places — they are made by the people who live in them.

ALL THIS leaves me enough room to tell about the real architectural "triumph," which stood in the center of town on a vacant lot between the G. J. B. Floyd department store and upstairs home of the Floyd family, and a small, frame building which was the office of John Albers' coal, feed and dray business. (There is a gasoline station on these properties now.) At the rear of the lot stood the only-one-of-its-kind (in our part of the country at least) ... a solidly constructed Two-Story Privy.

I HADN'T INTENDED to get to the subject of outdoor privies quite so early in the writing, but as they were such a necessary part-time abode I guess they should be ranked right along with the rest of the architectural gems of their day. There were quite a few pretty good outdoor privies in Bristol ... two of the best were at the school, where they did a pretty good business. They were built solidly and defied all of our attempts at up-ending come Hallowe'en time. All of the others were private or semi-so, which is just another way of saying they, for the most part, were public. We only had one "snob" in town who kept his locked. Once his got tipped over right along with the rest of them. (That's another story.)

THE TWO-STORY privy was a special sort of thing ... it was built to accommodate the members of the Floyd family from their upstairs quarters, while allowing a convenience for patrons of the store and a next-door pool room on the lower level ... and, of course, if occasion demanded, the public. It was reached from the upper level

by a stairway and cat-walk, which led to the second floor of the staggered relief station, which boasted a two-hole seating platform ... with a special shelf for current copies of the catalogs from Sears and Montgomery Ward. The public section downstairs was a two-and-a-half hole with the same accessories. Some genius thought up this vertical-staggering construction ... no doubt everyone thought he was crazy, but the plan worked for many years, and those in need never questioned his sanity.

THE CATWALK was a testing ground for "growing up." When we played hide-and-go-seek and like games of daring and speed the older boys would run up the stairs and jump off the walk to get away from "being touched." When we reached that point in our lives where we could make this jump we were "grown up."

PRIVIES, either one or two-story, are not exactly what you might call good "lead" material for a book, but it will serve to show how much trivia can be stored up in one small mind. Privies were such simple things of necessity ... and life was simple in my home town. It's tragic that it couldn't have stayed that way.

* * *

2

And Now About People

FOR MOST of my early years Bristol laid claim to a population of 699 souls. We always had a search going on for that "Missing Person" because we wanted to boast of 700. Population meant a great deal to folks in those days — it was a matter of pride for standings among other nearby towns. My father nearly had a heart attack one year when our count dropped down to 692 ... it was a local count so there wasn't any reason for suspicion of falsity — no one asked for a recount.

AS A KID I knew every one of those 699 residents — every man, woman and child of 'em! But more importantly they all knew me. This, of course, is the great charm and blessing of living in a small town ... you know everyone's virtues and faults, their troubles, their pains, and all their sorrows and joys ... and they knew yours. These things were all shared — a great blessing it is to have someone to cry with you for you know that they can laugh just as heartily when the troubles clear away.

I'D LIKE TO write about all those folks but, of course, there just isn't enough space, or time, for me to do anything like that. Some of them I want to mention because they all were something extra special in my life to some degree or another. (Some will have to remain for another writing ... there is a story, and in some cases, stories, for each of them.) Along about 1882 my father and mother, Horace H. Mosier and Jennie Bickel, were married in Indianapolis. My older sister, Marie, came on the scene in 1884 and shortly after that the family moved to Bristol, and my father took over the publication of The Bristol Banner, which chore had been handled by his father. 'Twas in June of 1903 that I was born in a little upstairs room of the Banner office. Then to accommodate the needs of the growing family we moved to the "old Romaine house" on East Vistula or Main Street, catty-corner across from St. John's Episcopal Church. (This house is now occupied by Merrill Thompson.)

WE HAD ONLY lived there for two years when my mother was Born into Paradise ... and at once every woman in town took over the job of "mothering" me ... and a couple of men also got into

the act just in case my father couldn't handle the job. That's how I got to know all the following good people ... there are a couple of stories for each of them, but I can't get them in this writing — perhaps another time.

BOTH MY grandmothers, Drusilla Mosier and Harriett Bickel, kept a close watch over the whole operation of Bringing Up Little Bruce. I'd like to tell you a tale about how both these good folk got shot during the Great Bristol Post Office Robbery, but that's another story. Ed Kramer and his wife were near-neighbors of ours, and while Ed and my father didn't get along too well, Ed always liked me and, oh boy, what fun! Occasionally he'd take me 'way into the country to butcher a critter for his downtown meat market. Mrs. Kramer always baked sugar cookies on Tuesdays and on those days I was always on her back porch when the first batch came out of the oven. If you've never had those kind of cookie-treats you've never really been fed.

THEN THERE were "Uncle George" and "Aunt Mary" Congdon. They lived with Mr. and Mrs. L. A. Congdon, owner of the Congdon Drug Co. There were several sons and daughters in this family and it was from them I learned how to play chess. Each winter the family staged a chess tournament and I watched many a good "title match" while keeping warm at the hard coal burner, which added a cheerful touch to the whole family picture.

AND THERE were Aunt Carrie Miller, Aunt Lizzie Klose (who later married P. D. Schall and was a sister to my step-mother, Inez Klose Danforth.) My Aunt Nellie Merritt and Aunt Gladie Bickel kept a watchful eye over me all the time. My Godmother, Florence Milburn Haas, was a "mother" to me all her life — she, with Aunt Floy Mathias and Mrs. Fred (Celeste) Menger saw to it that every Sunday I was in church. Mrs. Menger played the organ and she knew enough about boys to see that I always got a chance to sit right beside the "most beautiful girl in the world" — and neither Mrs. Menger, nor the girl, as far as I could tell, cared if occasionally I held her hand beneath the hymn book. I was partial to eight-verse hymns.

WHAT WONDERFUL folk they all were ... I wish you had known them as I knew them. There were no social lines to be drawn ... no one was very high up and no one was very low down. I found out pretty young in life that even the bad ones had some fine qualities. They were all, as we used to say, "rugged individualists" and they built and kept a fine town. God bless 'em!

* * *

3

Doctors, Bottles And Rough Stuff

BY THE TIME I was old enough to be running around Bristol was a very healthy spot in which to be living. They had withstood the ravages of a smallpox epidemic in 1899, and were on a rebuilding health program. One of the good doctors of the community, Dr. J. E. Barbour, had died just following the plague ('twas said he killed himself taking care of the sick) and I never knew him. But the stories about him were many, and for some he was a local hero. As a kid I knew four good doctors — Dr. Henry Dutrow and Dr. Frederick Aitken were two of the best. The latter had been present at my delivery into this life and I guess I grew up being a little partial to his ministrations.

A MOST dashing man was Dr. Dutrow ... he "raced" about town with horse and buggy, always making sudden stops so that he could talk to people on the street. He was a popular man-about-town with a smile for everyone. The smiles, I found out later, were a cover for a constant pain ... his back had been severely damaged in his fall with many people in the Harvest Jubilee Bridge Collapse of a few years before. Pain, however, never stopped his practice of medicine and he treated many of the sickly before his death a few years later.

TWO OTHER doctors also came into the picture (at about the time these older men were ending their practice. Dr. H. O. Walters was a young doctor, greatly liked and "covering the territory," say from 1916-18. He also literally gave his life for his people, exhausting himself during the great flu epidemic in 1918. One great family doctor arrived then — Dr. Samuel Frybarger. He stayed in practice for a good many years, ministering to the sick of Washington Township, part of York and much of Porter Township in Cass County, Michigan. He retired at the beginning of World War II to move back into "home" territory at Andrews, and later, Converse, Indiana. He didn't stay "retired" for long as a shortage of doctors due to the war called him back into action. For a time there was another doctor in town, Dr. Elmer Hagenbaugh ... his practice was pretty much limited to chess; he was mighty good at that.

DOCTORS USED to provide some financial support for

young merchandisers by buying bottles. We usually kept up a fairly lively search of our homes for "empties" and we toured the town "dump" for throw-aways. The doctors wanted all those 2- to maybe 8-ounce bottles that they could get ... we had to wash them to stand inspection before they would be accepted as pill containers. For the little ones we got 1-cent, the 4-6 oz. bottles brought 2-cents, and just occasionally an 8-oz. colored job might get us 3-cents.

OUR BEST buyer was Dr. Aitken ... and his office was where we had the most fun. His office stood on Middlebury Street beside the Methodist church. The floor plan was quite simple, consisting of three small rooms, one in front as a waiting spot; a second "inner" room (I never did find out what he used this for), and a third "back" room, where he kept all his pills and powders and such stuff. The inner room provided the thrill to our doing business with Doc Aitken. He kept the shades pulled on the windows here; the little room was kinda spooky with its half light, and just to make it more so, standing beside the door to the back room stood a skeleton, which Doc called Ollie.

A BUSINESS transaction with Doc went something like this: He met us in the front room with a greeting, "Well, well! So you boys have brought me some more bottles. My-my-my-my-o-my." And then came the inspection and the counting, and the totaling of what he owed us. "Well, well, boys — I guess we'll have to go into the back office to get the money." So into the inner room we'd go, with Doc leading the way. Now he'd rigged up a little cord that he pulled to make Ollie shake and rattle just a little bit, and just as we were inching by, Doc would say, "Now boys, watch out for Ollie; he's been a mite sickly lately and isn't feeling well." And he'd pull the cord, and we'd literally jump through the door into the back room.

OUR BIG fun really came when we found some younger kid who didn't know what it was all about to go in to "collect" for us. Doc usually gave him the full treatment. Once we sent Jim Hardin, a visiting lad from Elkhart, to carry out our business, and when he encountered Ollie he made one grand leap right through the back room exit, landing in a heap on the sidewalk outside, screaming bloody murder. He skinned up his knees and Doc had to patch him up. Scary stuff, all right!

LOTS of times we walked out to Bonneyville, where, up on the bluff overlooking the creek, was the remains of the old home of Captain Bonney. It was rumored that the captain had been quite a counterfeiter, and we had a lot of imaginary plans set up for how we



— *North side of Main Street looking west, Bristol, IN*

were going to handle all that fake money when we “discovered” it. Of course, we never did get any action, but there’s nothing quite as exciting, or scary, as an imaginary battle with the government agents over something which doesn’t exist. These things are the spice of life for a small boy.

ANOTHER tale that kept us kids interested was the one about a murder which had been committed a few years before out along the Mottville road. It seems that a local farmer had been dragged from his buggy one night and beaten to death ... it all happened near an old tree that stood on the west side of the road just about across from the entrance to Cop’r Canyon. There was always talk about the guilty ones being some local folk, but nothin’ ever came from it. It was always fun playing detective — just hanging around the tree was enough to open up a lot of thoughts.

I NEVER knew the older members of the Packett family ... the younger ones that I played with were a goodly lot. But the elders of the clan, ’twas said, were rough and tough — not so much with outside folks, but within the fold they were an unruly bunch. One (Carl) spent much of his time in the local lock-up for disturbing the peace ... it was said by some that on one of these “disturbing bouts” he had killed a brother, but it was never proven. No one seemed to know much about that part of the story. Maybe that’s all it was, just a story. Anyway, Carl’s name was carved on the walls of the village jail a great many times — testimony to a lot of visits. This little jail house stood on the back of the lot where the town hall now stands ...

the door was usually open, at least during the day, and we kids had ample opportunity for playing "cops and robbers" and studying the writing on the walls.

NO, ALL the local folk were not perfect, peaceful citizens by any means. The trouble-makers were a small part of the picture, however — just enough to add a bit of excitement to a small boy's life.

* * *



— *The two-story "triumph" was behind the brick building on the right*

Four Swimmin' Holes That Were Washed Away With The Years

THERE CAN HARDLY BE a memory so clear — or so enjoyable — as the sound of running, patting bare feet on a shaded path leading to the Skinny-dipping Hole. Or can there be a musical aria so bright and brilliant as that of the leader of the pack crying out “Last one in’s a so-and-so,” accompanied by the splashes of bare little bottoms as they land into the cool waters ... and the laughter, the giggles, and ohs and ahs ... oh my-oh-my-oh-my-oh-my!

THE OL’ SWIMMIN’ HOLES have had a great many stories written about them ... they have inspired poems and songs have been sung. They are almost a national institution and small towns have advertised them ... they have been in the dreams of every boy.

IMAGINE then the greatness of Bristol in these days, with its **FOUR** (count ‘em) Ol’ Swimmin’ Holes, and every one of them a natural. The Little Elkhart provided us with two of these spots. The South Bend hole was a little west of Oak Ridge cemetery, and was pretty much a family place — we held picnics there, with boys and girls, big and little, all over the territory. There was a sandy strip for child play on the east side and right across from it was a dandy, ol’ divin’ hole. The East Enders in particular kept this a pretty busy spot:

JUST BELOW the Mottville road bridge at another south bend in the Little Elkhart was Boyer’s hole. This was strictly a male, skinny-dipping place ... about the same natural advantages of the South Bend hole, without the female company. Along the nearby road was a row of large willow trees with several good-sized branches breaking from a crown about ten feet above the base ... these branches grew out in a nice, wide circle. With slats and brush arranged around the sides they made wonderful tree huts. We nailed boards up the trunks to provide a ladder access route ... and we chose up sides to see who could “hold the fort” against “the Bandits.” In between times we went swimmin’.

DOWN ON THE OL’ St. Joe, on the far west side of town, was Palin’s hole — another strictly male layout. I learned to swim here —

as most of the kids did — by what I called the Throw-in or the Instant Swim school. A couple of the larger boys picked you up and threw you in — and you swam out. It's almost a sure-fire course of instruction. What I didn't realize while I was passing the test ... with a great deal of fear, I admit ... was that all the boys were waiting to pull me out if anything went wrong. What a great bunch of fellows to grow up with. Later on I helped teach a few boys how to swim in the same way ... my son, Max, was a graduate of that school.

PALIN'S WAS pretty high-hat stuff for a natural swim-place — a little beach, a deep hole into which we dove from a spring-board or a swing. Below a submerged log which ran rather far out into the river lay a little eddy where the smaller kids could play and sun themselves. Out in the center of the river was a large rock — we called it Baby Rock ... (I wonder if it's still there.) It was something of a challenge to see if we could swim out and land on top of it. Baby Rock was laid in rather swift current and the trick of landing on it was accomplished by walking up the shore a-ways and taking off with a "fast-as-you-can" spurt, then letting the current carry you down to the rock. If you were lucky — or had had enough practice — you could "hit the spot" and stay there on its flat top. There was a justifiable sort of pride in the cry, "Hey, you guys, I made it." Ah, yes!

THE ST. JOE river was sometimes referred to as the Hudson of the West — Rex Buell of Elkhart, wrote a popular song about it ("On the Banks of the Old St. Joe"). One of its features was the clarity of its waters — so clear that you could see the bottom in almost all the deepest of holes. This gave us our greatest swimming sport — going after the "divies." The divies were old porcelain door knobs or the flat, white china-like plates from the fruit jar lids of those days. Every boy had at least two or three, according to his particular liking. We threw them out into the water and then swam around to pick them off the bottom. Whoever came up with the most was champ. Most of the boys of my day could stay under water for incredibly long periods of time ... "divey" lungs, I guess.

THE SWIMMIN' HOLE for graduates of the other three spots was the Bridge across the St. Joe at the center of town. A three-abutment iron-cement construction was built along about 1910-11, and its center abutment almost formed a natural swimming spot which came close to perfection for good swimmers ... and they were or we didn't let them go in. By its location near town it was a "dress-up" hole — we all kept our suits hanging on the "irons" under the on-shore approach foundation. Come swimming time we quick-like

got into our suits and "walked the irons" out to the center abutment; down the rods and there we were, at perhaps the best swimming hole of all. The current swirled around the abutment to make a nice eddy below, reaching down stream for quite a ways, where the current, reversing itself actually pulled us back to the landing spot.

WE HAD a 15-foot diving board here from "off the irons" — there was a ladder, which we must have "confiscated from someplace" by which we climbed to the top of the bridge. From there some of us went into our "high dive" act — it was about 30 feet. We could take off from bridge-floor level or we could climb upon the handrail for an additional 4-5 feet. I learned a valuable lesson here one Harvest Festival time.

MY FATHER was one of the judges of the contest events — and I went to him at the judges' stand asking for a little spending money, quite early in the afternoon. He informed me that he already had given me all the money he was going to for the day, and, of course, I was quite upset. He pointed out to me that if I had any gumption at all I would enter a few of the races and just maybe I might win a prize — and they paid cash in those days. Well, the only thing I was any good at was high diving off the bridge, so I got my name on the list for that event. We went from "the board" at 15-feet to the rail at 30-feet, and all but I and another lad dropped out. I forgot the other boy's name, but he dropped out of competition when they brought a ladder from a near-by filling station and I went up two steps and made the dive. I found out that if you want something you have to go after it. Thanks, Dad.



— Just "across" the bridge in 1909

THE BRIDGE was the grand-daddy of all the town's swimming holes ... it was easy to get to, and it was a great stage upon which to show off for the girls. No boy can have anything much better than that!

FLASH! (Which is the way anything important used to be announced as "it came off the wire") ... Even as I write I have been informed that the town no longer has any natural swimming holes. Erosion of the banks has caused most of them to "disappear" ... a new bridge has eliminated the abutments and swimming is prohibited at the center of town. This, I think, is accepted as progress. There are some backyard pools around town, all sanitary, pretty and nice — no logs or weeds or any of that kind of stuff — but it ain't the same, boys — it just ain't the same!

* * *



— *This was App's store in 1912*

5

From Swimmin' To Fishin' In One Short Jump

IT DOESN'T take a great deal of effort along thought lines to get from swimmin' to fishin' in the waters of the Little Elkhart and the Ol' St. Joe. They're about equally famous on both counts.

I COULD swim like a fish but I never had much success in catching the finny fellows — but I knew plenty of the boys who could. And I tried. In those days the Little Elkhart had bass and red-eye holes you wouldn't believe. Even I, who didn't know too much about the art of enticement, could always come up with enough red-eyes for supper when nothing else was available. It was only a matter of leaning out over the base of a willow tree and dropping a hook and worm down under the bank. Wow!

THERE WERE big fish, too. Plenty of bass, both small and large-mouth, were taken from the deep holes — and pickerel were plentiful in the eddies around the bends. There were rainbow trout in the Little Elkhart — and there still are, so they say. A couple of fly fishermen from Elkhart used to come into my dad's print shop every week or so with several nice trout. I never could master that art of fly-fishin' — I don't think it was ever a favorite method of fishing with any of the local boys. But the trout were there!

SAMMY PEASE was a great old fisherman, right along with my Uncle "Pete" Bickel and Fred App. Sammy seemed to know all the bass spots in the river and caught his fair share ... after his retirement as a rural mail carrier he acted as a "guide" for several Indianapolis fishermen who thought they were 'way up North in the fishing country. Sammy and one of these men spent a lot of their fishing time for several years trying to get what they said was the "Grand-daddy of all bass" ... they "had him on" (or so they claimed) several times but as far as I know they never conquered this King of Bass.

CARL VIRGIL was never very serious about his fishing, although he came up with "catches" fairly regularly ... it was always for fun. Carl was in charge of the poultry and produce sections of App's grocery, (later King's), and the back window of the production



— *River view from rear of App's store*

department commanded a fine view of the St. Joe and its waters just above the bridge. The small-mouth bass liked to linger around under the remains of an old ice-breaker out above the center abutment of the bridge ... you could see 'em playing around there on nice sunshiny days ... so Carl hooked up a line on pulleys running out of the window of his "office" in the store, anchoring it at the base of the ice-breaker. He had it all rigged up with a bell to "sound the alarm" when a fish "took to the bait." Carl caught a few fish this way but it was mostly for show ... and a few laughs.

ARNOLD "UNCLE CY" CONGDON should have been an Indian ... he quite frequently went fishing without any supply of bait ... a turn of a log would produce some kind of worm, which he would squeeze onto the hook and cast into the stream; while he waded around looking for a crab, which he then substituted for the worm, and went on fishing until he found a helgramite ... and so it went. It seemed like he always came home with a few bass.

RAY HALL was the patient fishing soul ... he could stand for hours in the eddy behind App's store, working a minnie in front of a pickerel. His catches were many, and usually worth talking about.

BUT FOR ME there could be only one King of the Fishermen. It started when we were kids and it never ended ... *WILBERT "RIP" MILLER* could catch fish in a bath tub ... I said it then and I repeat it to this day. It was uncanny the way he caught fish! I gave up fishing for a lot of years because of "Rip." One day we went behind his father's barn, near the bridge, and dug up a nice mess of worms

... and we went to catch the big red-eyes lurking around the piling near the first abutment of the bridge. In the nice, clear water you could see 'em all over the place. So there we sat, with the can of worms between us ... I could see those big ones come up and sniff at my hook, back away, and then lunge to fasten themselves on "Rip's" hook. This went on until he had caught 18 big ones, and I had none ... so I gave up ... I gave him my tackle, the box and all, and I never went fishing again until about 20 years later. "Rip" went on to move to California where he became known in no small way as the King of the Blue Gill Fishermen ... a title, I'm sure, he most richly deserved!

I LOOKED just recently ... the fishin' spots, like the swimmin' holes, ain't like they used to be!

* * *



— A "class" of berry pickers in 1908

6

A Lot Of Big Days — And Nights, Too, For That Matter

YOU CAN READ a whole lot about the big days and nights of gala openings and stuff like that on Broadway, Opryland and in Hollywood ... but nothing like that can compare to the productions of a small town like Bristol in the early 1900s. People took things like the Fourth of July, Memorial Day and Watermelon Festivals pretty much to heart. I admit there may have been more lights on Broadway but those torch lights of my day made a pretty good glare in the sky, too.

BRISTOL'S Fourth of Julys were pretty noisy affairs. I think the noisiest one was perhaps in 1912 or 13 when someone came up with the idea of wrapping equal amounts of potash and sulphur in tin foil. These turned out to be nice little pellets which we kids lined upon the tracks of the Valley interurban line from one end of town to the other. Maybe a mile-and-a-half of these young bombs going off every ten or so feet produced a real racket ... to say nothing of the wrath of the motormen and conductors of the line.

NEARLY the whole block west from Division Street, on the north side of Vistula, was a village green. This was used for watermelon festivals, homecomings, and such like. Mounds of watermelons would be "attacked" by large crowds, beginning early in the day ... there were picnic lunches, and barbecues ... and races and all sorts of things. Bristol really knew how to celebrate, and it didn't usually take much of an excuse to bring one into action.

MEMORIAL DAYS were times of real patriotic fervor ... and sincerely so. The Civil War ... and the Spanish-American War (although it was termed "kid stuff" by the Civil War vets) were pretty fresh in remembrance. A monstrously large flag (I wonder what ever became of it) was flown between the Opry House and the Telephone Office across the street ... and there were bugle corps, and parades, an' stuff. And then we all went into the Opry House for the service. I can remember when there were 27 Civil War veterans on the stage — among them were Adam Shetron, John Mitchell, Uncle George Congdon and Perry Rowe, who lost a leg at Gettysburg. I'm

sorry I've forgotten all their names but they meant a lot to me then, and yes, they still do!

BUT THE REALLY BIG BLASTS were the political rallies ... there were torch light parades, bugle and drum corps ... and plenty of liquor I'm sure ... and fights and all that sort of stuff ... politics was taken pretty seriously. The township caucuses were the target dates — everybody in the whole township, including kids, got ready for these great events. Although Washington Township was pretty much Republican the Democrats always put on a good show ... I guess everybody took part whatever way they voted. Most of the meetings were held in the Mosier Opry House, and the place was



— *Vistula Street, Bristol, IN*

packed ... hands clapped, feet stomped, flags waved, and sometimes even the scheduled speakers got into a fist fight before they even had a chance to get on to the stage.

ONE REPUBLICAN RALLY I remember real well ... I think it was Charles Evans Hughes against Woodrow Wilson, and because the township and county was pretty well decided as going Republican there wasn't much to talk about except the national picture. Judge L. D. Hall of Elkhart was the speaker of the evening and "Mel" Miller (father of my friend "Rip") was the main organizer and promoter. Before the program was really underway he practically turned over the festivities to "Rip" and I, who were on the front row.

THERE WAS a great custom in those days when you really wanted to make a loud, earth-shaking noise you "shot off the anvil." This was rigged up with an anvil buried in the ground with the top

level with the surface ... on top of this was placed a varying amount of gunpowder ... then another anvil, turned upside down, was placed on top of this. Then a white-hot iron, from a nearby fire, was laid upon the tongue of the anvils, and WHAM, BANG, ZOWIE ... the whole earth seemed to fall apart.

SO, ON THE NIGHT mentioned a few lines above, "Mel" Miller turned over the signal flag for the anvil shootin' over to us kids. "Every time the speaker says something patriotic wave the flag out the window and they'll shoot off the anvil." Well, of course, it wasn't long until everything the speaker said was patriotic as far as "Rip" and I were concerned ... and the anvils were soon so hot they couldn't fire 'em anymore ... 'twas said the next day they were ruined ... but anyway the whole night went off with a big Republican bang!

NO ONE protested much back then ... they were all FOR something. Maybe we need to shoot off a few anvils!

* * *

22

Then There Was A Real Event — Hallowe'en

ONE BIG, "CLASS A" EVENT in the years around 1912-13 was Hallowe'en. While I was too young to get involved in the production line I recall the sight of the finished work of chasing evil spirits, goblins, witches, and stuff like that. I don't remember that All Saints' Day got a very big play in the local churches, but then, as I say, I was pretty young.

LITTLE BOYS did an awfully good job of soaping windows and tick-tacking the homes of the "old folks" ... scared the livin' daylights out of 'em. We all had our nails with long resined string, and when two or three of us got together, with those nails fastened under the clapboards of the house-siding believe me the noise made the skeletons rattle in the closets. The nice thing about it that I remember is that no one got mad ... there weren't any juvenile delinquents in those days — just mischievous boys!

WHEN THE electric interurban line came to town in 1912 I think the cars provided a lot of inspiration for the Hallowe'en festivities. The construction of the line brought a lot of workers into town and they had a few new ideas — big city stuff, and all that, and the local boys really got into the act.



THE 1913 observance was just the greatest! I remember going down town with my father early in the morning to see "the show." Main Street was filled with everything you can imagine, from the Mottville road corner to the west end of town, 'way past the schoolhouse. There were wagons, buggies, cows, horses ... benches, outdoor swings, privies (there, I got back to them again) ... I remember a donkey outfitted with a straw hat and pairs of pants front and back ... there was a fairly good-sized chicken coop, complete with chickens ... the old band wagon was piled high with flower pots and urns from all over town — a masterpiece of a mobile-sort of greenhouse. I think all of Washington Township "that wasn't tied down" was moved onto Main Street. The interurban line was forced to stop on the west side, about where the library now stands, and passengers had to walk the rest of the way uptown. 'Twas a grand event, indeed! It was days before all the stuff got back home ... and it can't be over-emphasized, it was all done with a lot of laughter!

BY THE TIME I grew into the production age on this sort of celebration of Hallowe'en things had calmed down a good bit. We still got in some pretty good licks at chasing the goblins out of town, but nothing very spectacular. We tipped over a lot of privies (there I go again) and one I never seem to get off my mind. My father had a special sort of out-building erected behind the then postoffice (now the Bristol Opera House). At the right front corner of the edifice grew a fairly good sized tree ... according to my father this was supposed to prevent any pranksters from toppling the building over ... but it never did. A simple springing of the whole structure to one side permitted it to pass the tree on the way down, and the deed was done! Of course, the upraising was something different ... Dad usually had to hire a couple of men to spring the building back around the tree — and it went up a great deal harder than it went down. I used to help on this, so I know what I'm talking about! What I never could understand — and still don't, I guess — why didn't Dad cut the tree down and make it a lot easier for all of us?

ONE THING we never wanted to do with these Hallowe'en pranks was damage anyone's property, or at least not enough to count — and certainly we never wanted to hurt anyone. I remember one evening when a group of us took away the front wooden steps of the residence of "Aunt Min" Trager on West Main Street. We carried the steps up the street almost uptown when one of the fellows remarked, "You know, this isn't such a good idea. "Aunt Min" might come out there and step off the porch and hurt herself." So we

carried the steps back and replaced them, and re-fastened them even better then they were before. Somehow I always thought Harry Corner was a pretty good boy after that ... and I still do, God grant him rest!

WHEN HALLOWE'EN comes around I like to remember some of those kids with a few prayers ... they chased away a lot of goblins, witches and things and they were and are real saints, indeed!

* * *

This Space Reserved for Notes —
What Did You Do on Hallowe'en?

We Had Our Culture Moments, Too

WE HAD A LOT of cultural events in Bristol ... running all the way from Barbershop singing by a few of the boys who sang their numbers down on the bridge in the evening hours, right on up to music recitals and concerts in the Methodist Church or Opry House. I doubt that any of these productions would have made it to Broadway or Carnegie Hall, but who cared? ... it was good for us!

FOR KIDS there were the never-to-be-forgotten dog and pony shows, one or two of which hit town every summer. H. M. Freed's dogs and ponies were mighty well trained and put on their show in a (we thought at the time) large-sized tent. There was Casselman's (later the family settled in Bristol) Variety Show — a few dogs and ponies, and they presented some magic acts and musical numbers ... mighty good stuff usually played to a packed house. Then there were the Florence Players, a dramatic troop, which had a band concert before every performance at some spot on Main Street, then leading the "parade" of folks all the way to the tent-ground. They usually stayed around for two weeks, with a different show every night — they were the "class" of the day for that kind of thing.

QUITE A BIT LOWER down the scale was Tiger Bill's Wild West Shows. They pitched their tent on the lot where the fire department now has its station. Their "talent" consisted mostly of a few ponies running over some very low hurdles, a few rope tricks, and some not-very-good sharp-shooting acts. Most of the boys around town could have blasted out their whole show with a couple of shots. Tiger Bill had one of the roustabouts who claimed to be a tattoo artist ... his name was Fred ... he almost talked me into having a flag worked into my right arm. He was only going to charge me 75 cents on account of I had carried some water for the ponies. I went across the street to my dad's print shop to see if I could get the money, and I found a father that wasn't too much impressed with the man's offer. He took me by the shoulder and walked me back to the tent and had me pick out the "great artist." My father got to be "very big" about that time from my standpoint, as he pointed out to the roustabout in no uncertain terms, "If you touch this boy of mine

I'll punch your teeth right down your throat." And then he turned on me and gave me, what I know now, was a kind of loving kick in the seat of the pants, and told me to get out of there before he got mad. Thanks, Dad, I needed that!

FOR GOOD STUFF we had Myron Clay Hilbush, who came back home from New York City, to play a lot of classical piano ... and he had a sister, Florence, who married Clifford Pletcher, superintendent of schools — she was also a fine pianist and taught many pupils about town, including me, who never got very high grades or thunderous applause at any of her recitals. Then there was Miss Gladys Helfrich, music teacher in the schools, who had a brilliant soprano voice and often entertained at various programs. One of the native girls, Violet Corwin, was a fine singer — used to sing the accompaniment for the colored slides in the movie intermission spots. She later went on tour with a vaudeville troop. Mrs. Laura B. Kantz was a piano teacher, and very good with primary pupils. Her daughter, Ruth, later Mrs. Murray Frank, went into Chicago and played pipe organ and piano at many of the "loop" theaters. She also became quite a composer of popular songs and worked as a transpositionist for Lyon & Healey Music Co. for years, finally landing a name for herself in the Who's Who of the Music World. It was always a treat when she came back home to visit her mother.



THE LYCEUM programs usually came into town for four or five programs each winter, under the auspices of high school classes. These programs usually consisted of a lecturer, a male quartet, and a couple of musical ensemble groups. The male quartets always sang "The Old Flag Never Touched the Ground" to foot-stompin' applause. The encore was 'Asleep In the Deep,' featuring a bass solo. More applause!

SOME GOOD entertainment with plenty of laughs arrived each year with the Medicine Shows. There was the Dr. Bowser Medical Co. with good programs right along with their "cough" medicine ... and the Big Event of this type culture was provided by the Dr. Sharpsteen Medical Co. out of Union City, Michigan. This was top-notch entertainment ... he even made the "I tell ya what I'm-a-goin' to do" patter of the medicine promotion sound like a Broadway melody. Both of these outfits sold a lot of their "salves and tonic" at prices ranging all the way from \$1 a bottle right down to nothing — anything to get rid of the stock. Never heard of anyone getting better from taking the stuff — or dying either, for that matter.

EACH WINTER ON alternate week-ends a group of folks from St. John's Episcopal Church presented a play at the Opry House, exchanging with the local chapter of the Order of Eastern Star, who sponsored round and square dances. The music was provided by Cresco Stemm of Elkhart and his Starlight Orchestra from that chapter of the Order. One of those always at the dances was Eva Menges, third grade teacher, who later married Edgar Cathcart. My friend, Jimmy Cripe, and I would always wait around till late in the evening when she always saved one dance for us. Oh what joy — what bliss — what fun — what a night!

ONE OF THE GREAT show troupes of all time for a small town was the Bristol Dramatic Club. This was an outgrowth of the St. John's Church group and was headed by Clark and Nellie Barney and their son, Reid. In the years 1912-13-14 they produced a new show every two weeks, with the Opry House filled to capacity. They included everything in their repertoire from just this side of Shakespeare up to a mite short from grand opera. Reid Barney, along with the above mentioned Violet Corwin, sang vocal numbers between acts. In the main, though, they presented the old "mellerdramas" ... the audience was nearly always held spell-bound for three or four acts until the hero dashed in at the last minute to bring the funds to pay off the mortgage on the farm. There were always cheers when it was assured that Darling Nell had just been

saved "from a fate worse than death" at the hands of the "cowardly cad" who was always lurking nearby ... and the hand-roll curtain always stuck on the way down!

SOME OF THOSE who took part in this bit of our cultural goings-on were, in addition to those already mentioned, Mr. and Mrs. Clint Dussel, Mrs. Charles Kulp, William Long, Charles Haas, Val Casimir, Elizabeth Zimmerman, Mrs. Marie (Mosier) Hout, Mr. and Mrs. Grover Engel and a number of others I can't seem to remember. One very popular young man about town, Everett Virgil, was a sometime-star and always-property man ... the spirit behind the work seemed to lag after Everett was killed in an auto accident near Union, Michigan. Some of the good old stand-bys they presented were "Way Down East," "The Confederate Spy," "The Old Homestead," and "Those Dreadful Twins." Music was many times played by the Amidon Family orchestra.

LATER WE GOT movin' pictures into the Opry House ... we watched "Perils of Pauline," and all the actions of Dustin Farnum, Douglas Fairbanks, Wild Bill Hickok and Bill Hart ... we even liked Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish, and we got excited over "The Birth of a Nation" but it was never quite the same as the days of the dogs and ponies and the medicine ballyhoo. So much for culture.

* * *

Fires Always Burn Faster In Small Towns

IN THE EARLY 1900s Bristol had a lot of dreams go up in smoke. 'Twas said that the town was hit by three great fires ... they were all before my time, but there were a lot of stories still being told to us kids ... I suppose just to impress upon us the danger of playing with matches. The whole history of our town was changed quite radically by the first of these great fires. A large furniture factory was built on the south shore of the river just west of town ... power was provided through the operation of a small dam on the river (the remains of this were still around for us to see). This factory was to be the first of many hoped for by the village planners — Bristol was to be, according to the dreams, the center of the industry ... it might have become the "Grand Rapids" of these parts were it not for the fire. THEN, within the next two years there were more fires — one took most of the business buildings on the north side of Vistula Street, and another took several business places on the south side.

AS I GREW UP I had thoughts that the town never actually recovered from these fires ... coupled with some other important business losses the spirit of the citizenry never rose to very great heights in the years to come. One thought that was always on my mind was that fires always burn faster in small towns. The buildings were usually of frame construction, nothing much was known about fire walls and fire-proof building ... fire-fighting equipment was not the best — about all the town could afford, but not the best. The equipment was handled by town-loving, protection-minded volunteers, but they were handicapped. In Bristol we had great sources of water supply, both from the river and the creek, and there were two large underground cistern storage places at the center of town — one at the center of Main Street in front of where the Redbird tavern now stands, and the other at the intersection of Main and Division streets. The problem was getting the water delivered to the blaze ... and so I repeat, fires always seem to burn faster in small towns.

SOME OF THE FIRES I remember ... George Hamlet had a

large livery stable, located just about on the parking area between the now police-town hall and fire department buildings. This fire broke out one night (perhaps in 1913) and was a total loss ... all fires in those days were total losses. A team of fine driving horses was destroyed and I remember George Hamlet, a big, rough, tough man in appearance, but kindly, at least to us kids, walking back and forth, with tears streaming down his face, muttering, "Best g---d---d team of horses that God ever created." I was a friend of his son, Carl, and he told me years later that his father never really recovered from that fire.

ANOTHER fire I remember (around 1915-16) was the Charley Shupert hotel burning. This building stood where the former Martin garage (now an auction sale spot) stands on the west side of Division Street. It didn't take very long to burn — it was fairly early in the evening as I remember — but there were some strange sights of people running around in their night clothes.

A BIG FIRE (much later but still in my mind) took the Barnes-Ulery lumber yard, which stood on the site of the former John Boyer home (now Paul's Standard station.) This was a great loss to the town.

ANOTHER BLAZE took the home of my good friend, Jimmy Cripe, and his family (about 1920) ... it was a fine two-story residence which stood just west of the filling station on the northwest corner of Main and Division streets. A beautiful home went down in minutes.

BUT THE GREATEST fire of my time was the burning of the John Phillips canning plant on the Mottville road. This was housed in what had been years earlier the home of an electric power plant. I'm sure the course of the old race to the dam can still be found, and the last time I checked, some two years ago, the old vault still stood in a growth of underbrush on the east side of the road. This was a fine building and, as it had been vacated for a long time, provided a great spot for all kinds of games on rainy Saturdays ... every kid in town could swing from the beams and crawl over the large drive wheel and other machinery which was still in place. But the great enemy fire was to destroy all this ...

JOHN PHILLIPS, about 1915-16 (I would guess) opened up a canning factory in the old building. The business was fairly well-established and getting along nicely when a fire broke out one afternoon. I remember we were out for the afternoon recess at school when the alarm sounded. We never did get to the fire until school was out, but believe me it was still quite a sight ... our old play-spot

was gone completely, with nothing left but large piles of burned cans. But come evening the Spirit of Young America had taken over and the Greatest Cook-out in the town's history began to shape up ... a large crowd of young people — and some adults, too — showed up with loaves of bread, cookies and all sorts of goodies ... and by the light of the still-burning fire they pulled out the hot cans, cutting them open with hatchets and knives, to find corn, beans and peas all ready to eat. Oh, what a feast! It went on into the "wee, small hours," as the story-book writers put it. And you know I can't remember Mr. Phillips getting all mad, or shook up about this devouring of the remains of his property ... if I remember him rightly, and I think I do, he was probably eating with the rest of the folks.

THERE WERE other fires, of course, but these were some of those which linger in my mind. There is a great fear of fire, and so it should be. To a small boy grown old it still seems like fires always burn faster in small towns.

* * *



— *Bickel's Hardware in the early days. My "Uncle Pete" on the left*

10

Some Of The Great Folks About Town

YOU SHOULD have known all of these people ... I was privileged to have known and lived with them. Oh, precious memories ...

FRANK ADAMS was a friend of our family. I didn't know him in the younger, active days, but I gathered enough from a later-year acquaintanceship and tales from various sources to know that here, in the 1910-20 years, was one of the last of the great Soldiers of Fortune. There are so many stories tied up in this one person that perhaps deserve a whole book, so I can only touch upon them here. He used to come to see my father on a visit "back home" perhaps every six months or a year ... sometimes he was "broke" and borrowed some money — other times he came to pay it back. And there were stories on every visit. When I really knew him he was "back home" for good, running a one-table pool room, a few card games, and a lunch counter which served the best chili con carne in all these parts. In his younger days he had been a country school teacher, and in these later times he spent his spare moments in translating Greek. He had been all over the country with various promotional schemes. His last and greatest promotion was an attempt to sell stock in a corporation to build a canal across the Florida peninsula ... he was years ahead of his time, as the engineers are now talking about it's possibilities. There are a lot of the Adams' tales — they really do deserve a couple of chapters at least.

FRED HILBISH was a successful, self-made man, bringing to Bristol its first telephone system, which he operated for many years. He was an individualist, running the company **his** way. Criticism of the service was sometimes pretty caustic, but in his even-tempered, quiet manner, he always managed to tell the folks "When you tear the phone off the wall, just put it on the front porch and I'll pick it up the next time I come by." A calm soul if ever I knew one!

CARL VIRGIL was one of my favorites ... another calm soul, with a twinkle in his eye and a smile. I mentioned him earlier in the chapter on fishing ... but what I really remember him for was his kindness to us kids ... he sharpened our skates far better than anyone

else in town; he took us swimming, and always had a piece of candy or cookie to hand us. Later in life he operated a grocery store, and it was a popular spot ... he had and deserved many friends.

THE TOWN'S hardware store was owned and ran by my "Uncle Pete" (William Wallace) Bickel. All of the store's advertising said that Bickel's Hardware had stood on the "same corner" ... I'm sure it said "Since 1887." "Uncle Pete" had a boat on the river and he always was willing to let me borrow it — one summer I remember I practically considered it my own. Oh, what a summer it was — I collected soft-shell turtles in the mud-banks, I fished, and just "poled my way" all over the place. Bickel's Hardware was one of the real gathering spots for the men when they were just loafing. In the summer time the benches in front of the store had a few occupant story-tellers at nearly every hour of the day. In the winter everyone moved indoors around the wood-burning stove at the rear of the store. (These stoves were standard equipment at Congdon's Drug Store and the barber shops.) A roaring fire in these burners on a cold winter night, provided the focal point for a circle of men who came to just sit and after awhile to get into discussions upon a variety of things, usually beginning with the weather. Arguments always developed during these discussions, never anything violent, but you could bet, heated. You'd be surprised how serious men could get in talking about anything from their planned "next year's planting" to



how much of a crop failure they "had last year." As I remember it nearly every session ended up with a discussion of the aches and pains of everyone present, or some sort of gossip about those who weren't there to defend themselves.

A GREAT many of the town's practical jokes had their origin on winter evenings around the stoves of the stores on Main Street ... and Bickel's Hardware had its share of productions.

HENRY DUSSEL was a great favorite in my early days. He had a grocery store and the village bakery. My-oh-my, what food! Every morning at about 11:30 the hot buns came out of the oven and Henry, with a big smile on his face, made us sandwiches of dried beef for 2 cents ... and his cinnamon rolls, all warm and dripping with icing were also 2 cents. You should have tasted his bread at 10c a loaf ... oh, we should eat so good today! Henry played a long and vital part in the town's history — but for these early days the smile and the baking are the memories that count.

CHARLEY PAULUS always heightened the evangelistic fervor of the village in the early days. The community was predominantly Methodist and Charley's wife, Elizabeth, was a "pillar of the church" in every way. Charley, on the other hand, was rough and tough — a good man — just a little coarse in manner and speech. Each year, along about spring, the church arranged for the mission days or the evangelistic meetings. This was another "invasion" of culture to our town and we always looked forward to it. I can't believe it was any religious urging that made us attend — rather it was the expectation for what kind of a "show" Charley was going to put on. For each year he would promise his wife that he would attend ... and she would be filled with a great hope that the Spirit would this time, surely, move Charley forward to be received into the Church. After one or two evenings the climax usually took place. Charley would be seated on the aisle, all dressed up in his best ... and at the "coming forward" time the evangelist would come to Charley, place his hand upon his shoulder, and say, for the whole church to hear, "Mr. Paulus, won't you please come forward with us now?" Then Charley would stand up and reply, also for the whole church to hear, "Now, why the h--l would I do a fool thing like that," and turn around and stomp out. It was always a great show ... perhaps he staged it for our benefit. Elizabeth was crushed, of course, but on the whole, bore up very well.

SUMPTER RILEY, SR. was a grand gentleman who one day taught several of us a wonderful lesson in thankfulness for God's creation. It was a stormy day in March; not too cold, but a rainy,

dismal, windy day. A few of us were standing in front of the post-office, when it was where the Bristol Opera House now holds forth ... with most expressing their disgust at what a terrible day it really was. Down the street came Mr. Riley, splashing through the mud (the streets weren't paved then) with a long, rubber raincoat flapping around his body ... there was a big, happy smile on his face ... and he brought the weather complaints to a halt when one of the men remarked, "It sure is a h-l of a day, isn't it, Riley," and he replied, "I wouldn't know about that — it's a better one than I ever made." There wasn't too much said after that.

AUSTIN "IKE" ALVERSON was a kid inventor, grew into handy man about town with all sorts of machinery; became the best barber in town, or so many said, at least. Ike saved my life one day while we were skating on the river below the bridge. I went through an air hole and Ike got a long tree limb and pulled me out. My kids used to wonder why I thought so much of Ike. A lot of stories could be written about Ike ... maybe I will some day.

THEN THERE WAS FARNHAM "BUD" HERMANCE. Many of us knew him in later years, but unless you had been with him when he was young you could never know him. He was three years older than I but we were close friends. He was always coming up with ideas ... I think they came from reading — we both did a great deal of that — but mainly I think they were just the product of an active spirit. He was always interested in paints, even when we were small. A shelf along his bedroom wall was filled with various paint mixtures. Much of his employment was with several firms where his knowledge of paint was valued. When young he was always promoting something ... he had so many ideas that he irritated a lot of people as the years went by. He was a trap-drummer in the high school band (a band in high school was a rarity in those days) ... he played piano "by ear" and did a much better job of it than I did with training. He did many things and most of them he did well. He was a moving spirit behind Bristol for many years ... without any previous knowledge he built and fired the best fireworks display the town has ever seen ... and he did it on his first attempt. I think few of us realized what a precious soul we had among us. He gave liberally of his life for his home town, and it is most fitting that he is memorialized with a park in his name.

THERE ARE MANY more good folks I would like to mention but it would take more time and space than I have. I have recorded a few memories here of some 81 souls ... I apologize for missing 618. I would like to write about John Albers, William "Slip"

Kleckner, John Hite and his feather-renovating shop; Leroy "Dad" Sample's blacksmith shop, Ed Ivins, "Dad" Cutshaw, Earl and Raymond Floyd, Ward Kessler, Lloyd Keller, Rex Lee, Kenneth "Keck" Carmien, Jimmy Cripe ... and I could go on and on ... they all deserve some space. There were many fine people and it was one of God's greatest blessings when He let me be a kid among and with them.

AND SO we move on to —

* * *

*Jot Down the Names
of Your "Good People" . . .*

A Questionable Conclusion

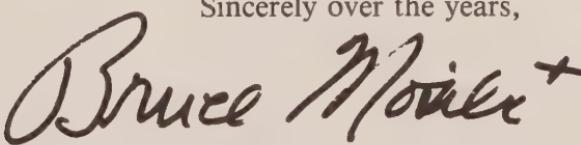
THERE CAN hardly be an ending to the sort of tale-bearing and commentation which has gone before. In writing this much memories have stirred to provide enough material for several efforts such as this. Years have a way of building a storehouse of these stories — some good, some bad, but in any case, worth telling, according to the author.

AND SO any ending is highly questionable. I could, I suppose, go back to the point of beginning with some sort of story about the two-story privy (such as the dropping of firecrackers from the top deck with startling effects upon the occupants of the floor below) ... or there are memories of the school-daze, with all the stages of puppy-love, continuing on to the stories of great (?) athletic events ... such as our basketball team in 1920 beaten in our first sectional tournament by South Bend Central with a score of 62 to 1 ... all sorts of things like that!

IT IS QUITE possible that some — or perhaps all — of these things should remain unwritten. No matter how it is said there can hardly be an ending to the stories ... they continue to unfold, thank God!

THANK YOU all for bearing with me thus far.

Sincerely over the years,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce Mosier". The signature is fluid and expressive, with a large, stylized "B" and "M". A small plus sign (+) is located at the end of the "i" in "Mosier".

The Rev. Bruce Mosier

* * *



— One of the Wild Ones

THE REV. BRUCE MOSIER, author of this small effort for the preservation of the trivia of another day, was born in Bristol, Indiana, June 8, 1903. He is now retired and lives in Goshen. This is his first work of this kind and covers his memories of an entirely different time. Unless you had been there you cannot possibly imagine what it was like. There were no TVs, no radios; there were a few cylinder record-playing phonographs, and a little later flat discs were being introduced. There were a few electric lights, from private gas engine generators, some acetylene gas systems, but mostly light and cooking heat was provided by wood or kerosene, or coal oil as it was more frequently called. By 1920 most homes had electricity but everyone kept a supply of candles on hand just in case.

BUT ALWAYS there were the good people. With their help Father Mosier managed to grow up, graduating from Bristol High School in 1921, fell in love, became married and in some years was blessed with a son and daughter, who with his wife, are still living. He worked for The Elkhart Truth for 20 years as a linotype operator, and then, through private study, was able to be ordained a priest in God's Holy Church in June of 1946. Much of this blessing is credited to the example and teaching of the Rev. Henry S. Streeter, early-day rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, Bristol; and to the faith of his Church School teacher, Elizabeth Zimmerman ... to these can be added the Rev. Dom Leo Patterson, the Very Rev. Leslie Skerry Olsen, the Rt. Rev. W. C. R. Sheridan, and a host of other priests of the Church. Father Mosier has served as curate at St. John's, Elkhart; priest-in-charge of St. John-of-the-Cross, Bristol; was rector of St. James, Goshen, for 20 years, and is now the Rector Emeritus. Since his retirement from regular parish activity in 1968 he has been acting as "priest to all outdoors," serving at more than 40 parishes in Northern Indiana and Western Michigan. Somehow he manages to find time to do quite a bit of "just loafing" and is thankful to God for the opportunity.

